



# Town of Groton, Connecticut

## Meeting Minutes

### Town Council Committee of the Whole

45 Fort Hill Road  
Groton, CT 06340-4394  
Town Clerk (860)441-6640  
Town Manager  
(860)441-6630

**Mayor Harry A. Watson, Councilors Heather Sherman Bond, Kathryn M. Brown-Tracy, Catherine Kolnaski, Deborah B. Monteiro, Frank O'Beirne, Jr., Rita M. Schmidt, Paulann H. Sheets, and James L. Streeter**

**Tuesday, November 27, 2007**

**7:00 PM**

**Town Hall Annex - Community Room 1**

#### **REGULAR MEETING**

#### **1. CALL TO ORDER**

*Mayor Watson called the meeting to order at 7:03 p.m.*

#### **2. ROLL CALL**

Members Present: Mayor Watson, Councilor Bond, Councilor Brown-Tracy, Councilor Kolnaski, Councilor Monteiro, Councilor Schmidt, Councilor Sheets and Councilor Streeter  
Members Absent: Councilor O'Beirne, Jr.

*Also present were Town Manager Mark Oefinger, Assistant to the Town Manager Lee Vincent and Executive Assistant Nicki Bresnayan.*

#### **3. Calendar and Communications**

*None.*

#### **4. Approval of Minutes**

##### **2007-0276 Approval of Minutes (Committee of the Whole)**

##### **RESOLUTION ACCEPTING COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE MINUTES**

RESOLVED, that the minutes of the Town Council Committee of the Whole of November 13, 2007 are hereby accepted and approved.

**A motion was made by Councilor Schmidt, seconded by Councilor Kolnaski, to adopt.**

**The motion carried unanimously**

#### **5. UNFINISHED BUSINESS**

*Councilor Bond requested a referral to the Finance Committee to review the way that tax bills are presented to citizens. She cited an example of a Florida tax bill that itemizes where the tax dollars are going, and noted she will provide a copy to the Town Manager. Mayor Watson made the referral. Councilor Sheets asked if the bills could also include a description of tax reduction programs that are available.*

*Mayor Watson noted that John Scott was previously appointed as the Town Council representative to the Phase II School Design Committee. It is not necessary for the representative to be a Councilor and Mr. Scott would like to continue serving on the Committee. The consensus of the Council was to continue to allow John Scott to represent the Council on the Phase II School Design Committee.*

#### **6. NEW BUSINESS**

##### **2007-0007 Pending Litigation (2007 Standing Referral)**

**A motion was made by Councilor Kolnaski, seconded by Councilor Schmidt, to enter executive session at 7:11 p.m. to discuss a proposed settlement on the school window issue, and to invite Town Manager Mark Oefinger to attend.**

**The motion carried unanimously**

**Discussed**

*The executive session ended at 7:25 p.m.*

**A motion was made by Councilor Kolnaski, seconded by Councilor Streeter, to recommend a resolution approving the proposed settlement of \$392,325 with JCJ Architecture.**

**The motion carried unanimously**

**2007-0072      Citizen Committee on Property Tax Relief - Update**

**Discussed**

*Five members of the Committee were present to address the Council. Genevieve Cerf distributed a printed "minority opinion". George Reed noted there has been no committee activity since the previous presentation was made to the Council. Mr. Reed provided an overview of the primary recommendation of the Committee. Mr. Reed and Director of Finance Sal Pandolfo answered questions posed by Councilors. Mr. Reed added that the minority views of Committee members have been well documented in the Committee's report and he does not feel there is a need to debate the issue again.*

*Ms. Cerf expressed concern that deferments and liens will discourage people from applying for relief. People want the security of owning their homes free and clear. She added that 7 out of 8 towns that have enacted this program have chosen outright tax credit rather than deferment.*

*Mr. Reed noted that he does not feel the deferment program that is currently in place in Groton is sufficient.*

*Councilor Sheets suggested that the Council establish a subcommittee to make a recommendation. Councilors Bond and Streeter also expressed support for more discussion of this item.*

*Councilor Bond asked if a donation fund could be set up for tax relief similar to what is done for utility bills.*

**2007-0271      Zeroing Bond Authorization on Completed Projects**

**Discussed**

*Director of Finance Sal Pandolfo described the request to zero out the bond authorization on completed projects, where all of the money was not spent.*

**A motion was made by Councilor Kolnaski, seconded by Councilor Bond, that this matter be Recommended for a Resolution.**

**The motion carried unanimously**

**2007-0273      Community Foundation of Southeastern Connecticut Grant - Arts Cafe**

**A motion was made by Councilor Bond, seconded by Councilor Streeter, that this matter be Recommended for a Resolution.**

**The motion carried unanimously**

**2007-0274      Regulations for Parks and Recreation Facilities**

**Discussed**

*Director of Parks and Recreation John Silsby noted the proposed regulations cover the parks and recreation facilities in Town. The regulations are usually reviewed on an annual basis by the Parks Commission. Mr. Silsby highlighted proposed changes including controlling the use of the fields at Poquonnock Plains Park through the use of a priority system and flag system. Councilor Monteiro questioned the limits on the use of the fields.*

*Town Manager Oefinger noted the need to clarify some of the language in the regulations, noting that "pick up" games are not allowed at the field and non-organized group play should be addressed. Mr. Silsby noted that use of Poquonnock Plains must be controlled and other fields must be developed so that groups are encouraged to use them.*

*Councilor Bond asked if the park was always designed to be a league only field or has it evolved. Town Manager Oefinger provided some history on Poquonnock Plains Park.*

*Jerry Lokken noted that Poquonnock Plains is a park and athletic field and it is hard to draw a line between the two. It would be better to provide more facilities.*

*Councilor Monteiro shared Councilor Bond's concerns and encouraged Parks and Recreation to work on providing athletic field facilities in other areas to address the situation described.*

*Town Manager Oefinger suggested the wording be reworked and that this item be tabled until that time.*

*Councilor Sheets suggested that the Town Attorney review the sign regulations. Mr. Silsby noted the regulations are currently being reviewed by the Town Attorney.*

*Councilor Streeter expressed concerned with use of Poquonnock Plains Park by outside residents. Mr. Lokken noted that outside groups are the lowest priority and the Town has never issued a permit to an entirely outside group.*

*The Council asked staff to provide examples of the activities that take place at Poquonnock Plains Park.*

*Councilor Bond suggested defining parking in the dirt area to allow more people to park.*

*Mr. Silsby then reviewed changes to the golf course regulations.*

**2007-0275      Update of Housing Rehabilitation Guidelines**

**Discussed**

*Director of Planning and Development Mike Murphy outlined three areas for discussion: housing rehabilitation guidelines, relocation policies, and requests for proposals, noting the current regulations are out of date. Staff has been working with the Department of Economic and Community Development (DECD). Paul Nichols, Community and Neighborhood Planner, provided an overview of the regulations. He noted there are currently 41 people on the waiting list for funding, which is provided on a first come, first served basis. The guidelines include components addressing emergency situations.*

**A motion was made by Councilor Bond, seconded by Councilor Monteiro, that this matter be Recommended for a Resolution.**

**The motion carried unanimously**

**2007-0140      Town Property at Buddington/Old Buddington Roads**

**Discussed**

*Mayor Watson provided a brief background on this item.*

**A motion was made by Councilor Bond, seconded by Councilor Sheets, to rescind the previous action recommending this item for a resolution.**

**The motion carried unanimously**

**A motion was made by Councilor Bond, seconded by Councilor Kolnaski, to refer the potential transfer of property to Groton Utilities to the Planning Commission under CGS 8-24.**

**The motion carried unanimously**

**2007-0265      Budget Guidance**

**Discussed**

*This referral was requested by Councilor O'Beirne. It was noted that the Council did not give the*

*Town Manager guidelines last year, except to ask for a level service budget.*

A motion was made by Councilor Streeter, seconded by Councilor Kolnaski, to direct the Town Manager to present a level service budget.

Councilor Sheets noted Mr. Sutherland's suggestion that department heads evaluate their budgets in a different way. She stated she does not support a zero budget or cutting services. Councilor Bond asked to meet with department heads again, and also that the Council provide budget guidance to the Board of Education. She feels it is important that the Council request the same level service budget from the Board of Education since that is where the majority of the money is spent. Councilor Streeter agreed with Councilor Bond's suggestion.

The motion carried unanimously

**Discussed**

*Town Manager Oefinger noted his concern that establishing budget guidelines is "drawing a line in the sand" when not all of the information is available. It is difficult to identify programs that everyone is willing to eliminate. Arbitrary percentage guidelines are not practical, and it prevents information from flowing to the Council so that decisions can be made about programs and practices. The Town Manager stated that Town staff has a long track record of analyzing operations on a continual basis. The Town Manager would like to hear from the Council what programs the Town should do more of and what programs should be eliminated. That will be the only way that there can be meaningful impact on the budget process in Groton.*

*With respect to budget guidance for the Board of Education, the Town Manager suggested that in the long term it is better to have the Council and Board talking on a regular basis about budget issues. Councilor Bond noted the Town must look at the revenue side of the equation also. She asked how best to relay individual Councilor's suggestions on cuts or additions. Town Manager Oefinger noted that the discussion should take place at a Committee of the Whole meeting since he takes direction from the entire Council as opposed to individual Councilors.*

A motion was made by Councilor Streeter, seconded by Councilor Bond, to recommend to the Board of Education a level service budget.

Councilor Sheets noted that without any say on the specifics of the budget, only the bottom line, she is concerned that the Board may have a different interpretation of level service budget. Town Manager Oefinger noted the resolution will reflect that the Council is looking for a budget that is financially representative of a level service budget.

The motion carried unanimously

**2007-0266 Town Attorney Appointment**

**Discussed**

*Mayor Watson noted that by Charter, the new Council has 60 days to appoint a Town Attorney.*

A motion was made by Councilor Sheets, seconded by Councilor Bond, to appoint Eileen Duggan et al. as Town Attorney.

The motion carried unanimously

**2007-0261 Town Clerk Compensation**

**Discussed**

*Town Clerk Barbara Tarbox provided background information and an evaluation form to the Town Council. By Charter, the Town Clerk's salary is set annually on January 1st. Councilor O'Beirne would like to wait until January so that the time period covered by the evaluation is complete. Discussion of this item was postponed until January.*

**7. Consideration of Committee Referral Items as per Town Council Referral List**

*Councilor Streeter noted that the Temporary Rules Committee met, but did not make any recommendations.*

*Mayor Watson reviewed his recommendations for Groups and Committees.*

*Town Manager Oefinger noted that the Mayor has the authority to establish the committees and the Council Rules simply document the committees. Councilor Sheets asked that her committee be named Environment/Energy.*

**8. OTHER BUSINESS**

*The consensus of the Committee was to cancel the December 26th Committee of the Whole meeting and the January 2nd Town Council meeting.*

*The Holiday Lights Parade will be held Saturday, December 1st.*

*Councilor Bond asked if Ledge Light Health District has a plan in place to prevent the spread of MRSA. Mayor Watson asked Councilor Kolnaski who is on the Ledge Light Board to raise the issue.*

**9. ADJOURNMENT**

*A motion was made by Councilor Sheets, seconded by Councilor Schmidt, to adjourn the meeting at 9:24 p.m.*

*The motion carried unanimously.*